

MUSIC

JAZZ BY DAN OUELLETTE

Chris Botti's Sophistication Sells

It is an anomaly when a mainstream, largely instrumental jazz album breaks into The Billboard 200, but it is particularly noteworthy when said disc scales the chart and settles in for an extended stay.

That is what happened last year when trumpeter Chris Botti's ballad-drenched "When I Fall in Love" not only spent 32 weeks on the pop albums chart (peaking at No. 37) but also held at No. 1 on Top Jazz Albums for 17 weeks.

Botti's Columbia Records follow-up, "To Love Again," could be an even bigger hit. The impressive pop-jazz crossover outing includes guest singers from Sting to Steven Tyler sharing the spotlight. It streets Oct. 18 as a standard CD and DuMDisc. Columbia and Borders Books & Music have ramped up mammoth marketing strategies to further expose and promote the magnetically handsome trumpeter who plays with a smoothly sublime allure.

"'When I Fall in Love' went mainstream beyond my wildest imagination, especially since it's slow, melancholic music," says Botti, who is on a two-month U.S. tour, which culminates in a double-header Nov. 25-26 in Honolulu. "I wanted to make a jazz record that was easy to digest and be enjoyed as a lifestyle listen while also being appreciated by musicians for the music and its high quality of recording."

A collection of standards that featured Sting and Paula Cole, "When I Fall in Love" has sold 526,000 copies in the United States, according to Nielsen SoundScan, and has been certified gold, a tremendously rare feat for a jazz album. His previous sales high was for 2001's "Night Sessions," which has scanned 182,000 copies.

Botti says last year's triumph "set the table" for "To Love Again," which also features vocals from Michael Bublé, Jill Scott, Gladys Knight, Renee Olstead, Rosa Passos and Blue Nile's Paul Buchanan. Interspersed throughout the Bobby Colomby-produced collection are four moving instrumentals.

The CD was recorded at Capitol Studios in Los Angeles and Air Studios in London. Although not a typical standards album, it includes such pop-jazz chestnuts as "My One and Only Love," given an aching read by Cole; a relaxed jaunt through "Good Morning Heartache" with Scott; a stringswinging into "Let There Be Love" with Bublé; a hip, big band dance through "Pennies From Heaven" with Olstead; and the highlight of the pack. **continued on >>p66**

FACT FILE

Label: Columbia

Management: Marc Silag, Right Side Management

Booking: International Creative Management

Publishing: Muted Music (ASCAP)

Top-selling/last album: "When I Fall in Love" (2004), 526,000



CHRIS BOTTI (cont.)

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"Are You Lonesome Tonight?" given what Botti calls the "instant heartbreak" treatment by Buchanan.

"I wanted to give these vocalists an opportunity to sing songs they normally don't get a chance to sing," he says. "Except for Rosa Passos, I knew all these singers personally beforehand. I have a working relationship with them, so it wasn't a question of having the label line up a bunch of all-stars."

As for criticism from the traditional jazz world that Botti's style veers into smooth jazz territory, the trumpeter is not fazed.

"I look back to Miles Davis working with [arranger] Gil Evans to get that melodic or-

chestral sound," he says. And he points out that the trio of arrangers from the last CD—Jeremy Lubbock, Gil Goldstein and Billy Childs—are onboard again.

"This is not dumbed-down music, but sophisticated and romantic," Botti says. "And to think that today it could sell like a pop record for the adult audience, that's exciting to me. It's like finding a needle in a haystack."

Botti pays homage to Davis on the DualDisc version of "To Love Again." In addition to live-in-studio footage of two instrumentals from the CD, there are two non-album performances: "Milestones" and "Flamingo Sketches," both by Davis.

Botti credits Columbia for taking the risk "to promote a trumpet player like me." Columbia Records Group chairman Will Botwin returns the compliment.

"Chris is special, both as a musician and a person," Botwin says. "He's dedicated, passionate and a joy to work with. Our goal with the last album was to break Chris out. We're so pleased with the results that we're gearing up to take the new CD to a new level. We're expecting big things."

While there is not an official single, Botwin says the label is pushing the lushly romantic Sting collaboration, "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?," as a prerelease

iTunes exclusive; the Scott song to smooth jazz radio; and the Buchanan number to triple-A. A full-page ad will run in *The New York Times* Oct. 16, and a half-page ad will appear on the same day in the *Los Angeles Times*.

Botwin also says Columbia is aggressively working TV, including appearances on "Today" Oct. 18, "The Tony Danza Show" Oct. 20 and "The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson" Nov. 29.

There is also a direct-response TV campaign with ads running on such outlets as A&E, the Food Network, Oxygen, Fox News, Bravo and the National Geographic channel, from mid-October to mid-November.

Spot ads will also run during "Today," "The View," "Live With Regis and Kelly" and "CBS Sunday Morning."

In the first week of December, Botti will perform on two high-profile CBS-TV programs: daytime soap "The Young and the Restless" and the prime-time "Victoria's Secret Fashion Show."

Botwin says a Botti return to "The Oprah Winfrey Show" has yet to be nailed down. His appearance last year dramatically triggered sales of "When I Fall in Love." Borders pop/jazz buyer Jessica Sendra says, "I've never seen a spike like that. The album was following a traditional sales pattern and then went through the roof. I was

caught off guard. We learned from experience. I'm being very aggressive with the new CD."

Borders will offer a chairman-only limited edition of "To Love Again" with a bonus track: an instrumental version of "Body and Soul." Another Borders exclusive is a boxed set of Botti's last three Columbia CDs, including 2003's "A Thousand Kisses Deep" and "Night Sessions." In addition, the New York Borders store at Columbus Circle will feature an in-store Botti performance Oct. 19.

Sendra is upbeat about "To Love Again." She says, "I anticipate this and Diana Krall's new Christmas album will be among our biggest sellers this coming season, across genres." —

Steve Silvestri Photo: Chris Benson/WireImage.com